

## Wabash County SWMD: Wabash River Defenders' 62 Ton River Fest and other Recognitions

In 2011, in a small café in Lagro, Indiana, a group of friends who dubbed themselves “River rats” had a dream to clean up the county’s 19.2 miles of the Wabash River from the Huntington county line to the Miami County line.



From this dream to just a few short months later, the Wabash River Defenders (Defenders) was born and had grown from six friends to a group of over 350 volunteers. They gathered on a sunny Saturday morning in July and verged upon the river with a mission to clean until nothing else could be found. The Defenders increased their collection annually. Likewise, the Wabash County Solid Waste Management District (WCSWMD) annually increased the amount recycled from that collection. The breakdown of the collections by year follows.

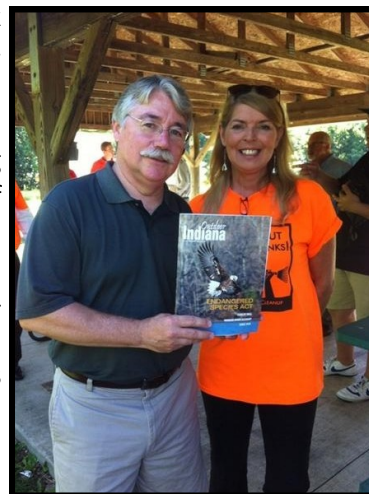
- 2011 – In one 4-hour event, the Defenders pulled 40,041 lbs out of the river (including 479 Tires!).
  - Of this, The WCSWMD provided services to recycle 57 percent!
- 2012 – They pulled 47,805 lbs (including 590 tires!) out of the River.
  - The WCSWMD was able to recycle 70 percent!
- 2013 – They pulled 36,179 lbs (including 511 tires) from the river!
  - The WCSWMD was able to recycle 83 percent of what they collected!
- That’s a **grand total of 124,000 pounds, or 62 Tons**, in just 3 events!
- 2014 – No clean-up event was necessary!



In 2014 with having scouts out on the river to monitor its condition, the Defenders found that a cleanup was not necessary. So to celebrate all of these efforts and success, they decided to hold the first annual 62 Ton River Fest. The fest consisted of a 5.2 mile river float and a free fish fry. The fish fry treated guests to Silver Tails (caught in the local waters) and Creek bank taters. During the development of the Defenders, the group got the attention of Indiana’s Attorney General, Greg Zeoller, who is on a mission



to clean Indiana’s rivers. Attorney General Greg Zeoller was the guest of honor at the River Fest; the Defenders presented him with the “Tall Sycamore of the Wabash” award. The festivities ended with music by the Daddy Os.





Other successes from the WCSWMD include a new ordinance, and attention from a non-profit organization. With Attorney General Zeoller's support, the Defenders were able to change an old county ordinance that put a \$100 fine on illegal dumping to a much more substantial \$10,000 fine. To assist in helping to get the word out, the WDSWMD supplied signs that inform county residents about the new ordinance. The Defender volunteers erected the signs along the river in problem areas.



The Defenders have also caught the attention of The Banks of the Wabash, Inc., a non-profit organization based in Lafayette, that is dedicated to preserving, enhancing and promoting the significant historical and natural resources of the Wabash River Corridor. Their board designated the Wabash River Defenders' River Cleanup as the best community project in the State of Indiana along the river. In the July/August issue of Outdoor Indiana, the official magazine of the Department of Natural Resources, an article titled, "We All Live Downstream" was published. This is the motto of the Defenders.